

The Builder.

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THE northern wing of the Privy Council Office, Whitehall, as altered by Mr. Barry, is to be commenced immediately. A boarding has been formed preparatory for taking down the old Treasury offices, on the site of which it will stand, and an eyecore in one of our noblest thoroughfares will thus at last be removed. The structure in question would probably have been removed long ago, for the completion of Sir John Soane's design, but for an oversight in setting out his new building, which would have made the continuation of it advance so greatly on the foot-path, as to have interfered with the regularity of the street. Now that the old deformity is really coming down, we have one plea to make for it, which is that its Tudor doorway, and other similar parts, relics of a more ancient building, may be safely preserved.

Little did Sir John think when he finished his Privy Council Office in 1825 or 1826 (with the exception of the north wing), that the artistic part of it would so soon give place to the work of another; indeed, a much less partial witness if appealed to could scarcely have expected that such would be the case. So quietly and quickly too has it been done, that the public have been asked how they like the alteration, before they had inquired whether it was necessary or desirable. The want of greatly increased accommodation, and the required alteration of the line of front, appear conjointly to have led to it, and unquestionably the metropolis is a considerable gainer in consequence.

The front is exceedingly ornate above the ground-floor, and displays that carefulness in the details apparent in all Mr. Barry's works. Attached Corinthian columns (a long series), on rusticated piers brought out from the front wall to receive them, carry a highly enriched entablature, which is crowned in the centre portion of the composition by a balustrade. The wings have an attic story, terminated with a similar balustrade. An enriched frieze is introduced under the cornice of the attic, and on the face of the attic pilasters are carved "drops" of fruit and flowers. The pedestals in the balustrade carry urn-shaped vases; those at the angles of the wings are more lofty than the others. The entablature breaks over every column, as does the attic cornice over the pilasters; and with the piers on which the columns stand, the pilasters, pedestals, and vases, give that predominance to the vertical line which obtains in the greater number of Italian structures raised during, or soon after, the Revival, and which resulted almost necessarily, from the employment of adventitious columnar decoration.*

These numerous breaks in the entablature produce a certain degree of flutter, not altogether free from objection. A stronger ground of objection, however, for those who are anxious to cavil, is a want of unity. We do not mean to say it can be urged justly

that the parts are in any degree discordant—quite the reverse; all are homogeneous, and in good agreement,—but that it fails to point itself out as one public building. It may appear to the stranger to be a range of Government offices, or a series of private residences; and this we hold to be a failing; but then it is a failing which belongs rather to circumstances than to the architect.

As we are in Westminster, let us look in at the new Houses of Parliament (notwithstanding the notice posted at the principal entrance),† where the same able architect is expressing himself in a different language.

The objection to which we have just now alluded, is often urged against the Westminster Palace, but has never seemed to us valid, even in its present state. And it would not be difficult to shew the reason why. Moreover, when the design is completed, when the towers rise to their intended height, the effect will be to alter the outline entirely, and group the whole, more perfectly still, into one pile.

In the House of Lords, to which, more particularly, attention is now directed, the works are making rapid progress. The ceiling and upper part of the walls are finished, and carvers and joiners are occupied in every corner of the place in fixing the wainscot fittings, both in the House and lobbies. Those in the former are most elaborately carved out of the solid, and reflect great credit on the workmen.

The decorations will be gorgeous—dazzling. The ceiling, formed into deeply-sunk panels, is covered with gold and colours. Under each wall-piece, from principal timbers, is a sculptured canopy and niche, solidly gilt where finished, between which occur the windows, to be filled with stained glass (six on each side), and compartments for fresco.

The *Athenæum*, in a recent number, expressed some misgivings as to the propriety of such adornments: "because, though casual visitors may be more than satisfied—even enchanted—'My Lords,' themselves, are likely to feel sated by the constant blaze of so much architectural and pictorial pomp. Such a sumptuously, not to say extravagantly adorned hall, would be more in place within the walls of Windsor Castle, for royal banquets and festivities, than as a place for solemn debate on grave and anxious matters. Putting propriety of purpose out of the question, we entertain great doubts, too, as to the effect which such profusion of painted glass as is intended will have upon the fresco paintings. Besides that gleams of coloured light may occasionally fall from the windows upon parts of the mural pictures, quite different in hue from the colours on the latter,—will not the windows overpower the paintings, and cause them to look flat and dull, by comparison?"—or can that inconvenience be remedied by exaggerating the colours of the frescos, and painting them up accordingly?‡

It further says:—"We may be allowed, also, to ask, whether another matter has been taken into consideration—because if it has hitherto been forgotten or overlooked, attention should be directed to it without further delay. Will not the effect and cha-

* The whole length of the front, when completed, will be 306 feet; the height of centre part, 56 feet 6 inches; and of the wings, 67 feet 6 inches. The latter is made out thus:—
Height from pavement to base of column ... 19 ft. 8 in.
" of columns ... 23 6
" entablature ... 6 6
" attic ... 11 6
" balustrade ... 6 6
67 6

† Great inconvenience and interruption to the progress of the works having been occasioned by the admission of strangers, the issue of all further orders of admission is herewith prohibited.

racter contemplated for the 'House' be, in great measure, lost at those particular times when the place will be chiefly need for business. After dark, the painted windows will not show themselves otherwise than as gloomy gaps and vacancies, occupying the upper half of the two side walls. A singular degree of brilliancy might, however, be obtained at night, by lighting up the House chiefly, if not entirely, from without—by means of gas burners on the outside of the windows. This would be further useful as helping ventilation. The plan appears to us to have, independently of its novelty, much to recommend it;—should there be objections to it, not perceived by us, we yet hope that while they have their due weight, the suggestion itself will not be wholly disregarded—merely because it is a suggestion."

The effect, we venture to think, would be much more agreeable without these illuminated windows than with them. Relative to the windows themselves, we cannot find that any of the glass painters are engaged upon them; certainly not the London artists, which is somewhat surprising, considering the shortness of the time which is to elapse before the Peers are to meet there.

Some anxiety, we know, prevails on this subject amongst the glass painters who exhibited their works in the Commissioners.

One work in fresco is already completed, the "Baptism of Ethelbert," by Mr. Dyce. It occupies a very honourable position at the west end of the chamber, and is an admirable specimen of the art.

This article having taken a gossiping form, we will say a word or two on some recent proceedings in another public building, which shew that we have yet much to learn.

After unsuccessful trial of diverse new materials, the open area of the Royal Exchange is again paved with the "Turkish stone" that formed the pavement of the old building, and which, we cannot avoid saying, looks very coarse, artificial, and unworthy of its position. Tesselated pavement was laid in the first instance, and failed. This gave place to asphalt; and then the asphalt was cleared away to let in the old stones again. We look on these failures as something almost disgraceful, not to the architect of the building, but to industrial and artistic England. The Romans constructed magnificent pavements here more than fifteen hundred years ago, which, when opened, as at Woodchester and Cirencester, lately referred to, or in Threadneedle-street, close to the building in question, are found even now solid and substantial, brilliant and effective. We, with what they have done before our eyes, and with all our boasted advances in knowledge and our improved machinery, make two attempts to produce a pavement for the chief building in the city of London a little out of the common way (only very little), and failing utterly, are obliged to go back to the old stones of the former area.

The occurrence is suggestive, and should induce consideration.

A WORD TO ARTISTS.—Use the simplest and best-understood medium: do not risk the premature destruction of your paintings by indulging your caprice or risking experiments in the wrong place. Several of Milton's pictures are beginning to present a melancholy appearance, through the failure of the medium employed. The eye of the principal figure, in his fine work from Spenser, deposited in the National Gallery, has actually floated out of its place. The picture has been reversed, in order to get the eye back again—but success seems doubtful.

* The predominance of the vertical line in the new building has been already remarked on in the current number of "The Civil Engineer's Journal," which, we should mention, gives an excellent representation of the front.